



**Testimony Regarding H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET
FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING
APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR**

**Peg Oliveira, PhD
Appropriations Committee
February 21, 2017**

Chairpersons Formica, Osten, and Walker, Ranking Member Ziobron, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee: My name is Peg Oliveira and I am the Executive Director of the Gesell Institute of Child Development, a non-profit early childhood research and professional development organization that has worked nationally, from our headquarters in New Haven, Connecticut, for over 65 years to promote the principles of child development as the basis for all decision making for young children.

I am submitting comments Regarding H.B. No. 7027 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2019, and Making Appropriations Therefor.

We would like the committee to consider the following:

Connecticut must maintain momentum toward a true early care and education system and stay on par with other states in this effort. The budget plan eliminates or reduces funding for a number of early education programs including Care4Kids, State funded Head Start, Healthy Start, Community Plans for Early Childhood, Even Start and Help Me Grow. The Governor's plan transfers the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Infant Toddler program, which in Connecticut is known as Birth to Three, from the OEC to the Department of Social Services (DSS).

These are dramatic steps backwards for Connecticut. Early care and education programs can best support the intent of overall state and federal funding for early care and education programs and investments in school funding only when understood as a significant and integral part of a coordinated early childhood funding system, and adequately funded. Moving away from integration, and specifically out of the OEC is moving in the wrong direction.

Care4Kids has great unmet potential due to restrictive eligibility and funding levels. Care4Kids, the child care subsidy program administered by the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) was established to provide monetary support for moderate- and low-income working families who need care for their infants, toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children. This program helps Connecticut's low income parents pay for child care. Care4Kids' funding can be used at centers, licensed family day care homes, and unlicensed family and neighbor care. Without this subsidy, child care fees for one child can consume 25% to more than 40% of a family's annual gross income; it can make the difference between a parent being able to afford to go to work or remaining unemployed.

Care4Kids funding is reduced by \$7.4 million in FY18 and \$12.6 million in FY19. This will result in freezing Priority Groups 2, 3 and 4 to new applicants until FY19. Priority Group 2 is for parents who have been enrolled in the Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) in the past five years. Priority Group 3 is for teen parents, age 18 and 19 years old, who are attending school. Priority Group 4 is

for low-income working parents earning under 50 percent of the State Median Income. None of these families will be eligible to apply for the child care subsidy.

Cuts to Care4Kids funding are falling on the backs of low income families who are struggling to find safe, quality care for their children so they can work. By closing intake to new families, Connecticut will deny this much-needed subsidy to thousands of families, putting children into harm's way. Closing the Care4Kids program to needy families puts many children at risk for not receiving the high quality care they need during their most vulnerable years, costing Connecticut later in services to make up for the failure to support these children earlier.

Importantly, closing intake to new families, by necessity denies access to Care4Kids to all newborns and young children not already in the program. Subsequently, older children will roll off. Additionally, arduous filing and documentation cause many families to fall off, regularly, though they are in fact eligible. Eventually there will be no children left accessing the subsidy.

In an effort to maintain momentum toward a true early care and education system and stay on par with other states in this effort, to maximize the federal dollars allocated to Connecticut for the Care4Kids Program, and to best serve children, we recommend:

- Retain early childhood programs like Birth to Three and Care4Kids, within the Office of Early Childhood and independent of the Connecticut Department of Social Services.
- Return sufficient appropriation to Head Start, Healthy Start, Community Plans for Early Childhood, Even Start and Help Me Grow.

**Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony regarding H.B. No. 7027.
Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or need additional information.**

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